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ABSTRACT

The fifth in a series of 10 study units for a Migrant Educators' National Training OutReach (MENTOR) correspondence course discusses effective instructional strategies and teacher behaviors for migrant education. Designed for use in preservice or inservice teacher education, the unit reviews classroom approaches involving mutual respect for individuals and cultures, self-esteem, and techniques using pairs, small groups, peer tutors, and community resource persons; encouraging students to talk; and downplaying standardized tests. The unit explores the lack of evidence connecting learning ability and cultural/socioeconomic background and proposes a view of the average school, rather than the average migrant student, as being disadvantaged. Excerpts from books and research reports illustrate how learning problems can be caused by the ways school life relates to a child's culture and how caste systems in schools impede learning. The unit emphasizes the importance of developing self-esteem in migrant children but cautions against making self-esteem an end in itself. It also discusses the cultural bias of standardized testing and fallacies of labeling. Teaching methods examined include group activities, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, teacher aides, games, and encouraging open-ended discussion and student speech. A 26-item bibliography and addresses of state offices of migrant education are included. (LFL)

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**BOOK 5**

# HARVESTING the HARVESTERS

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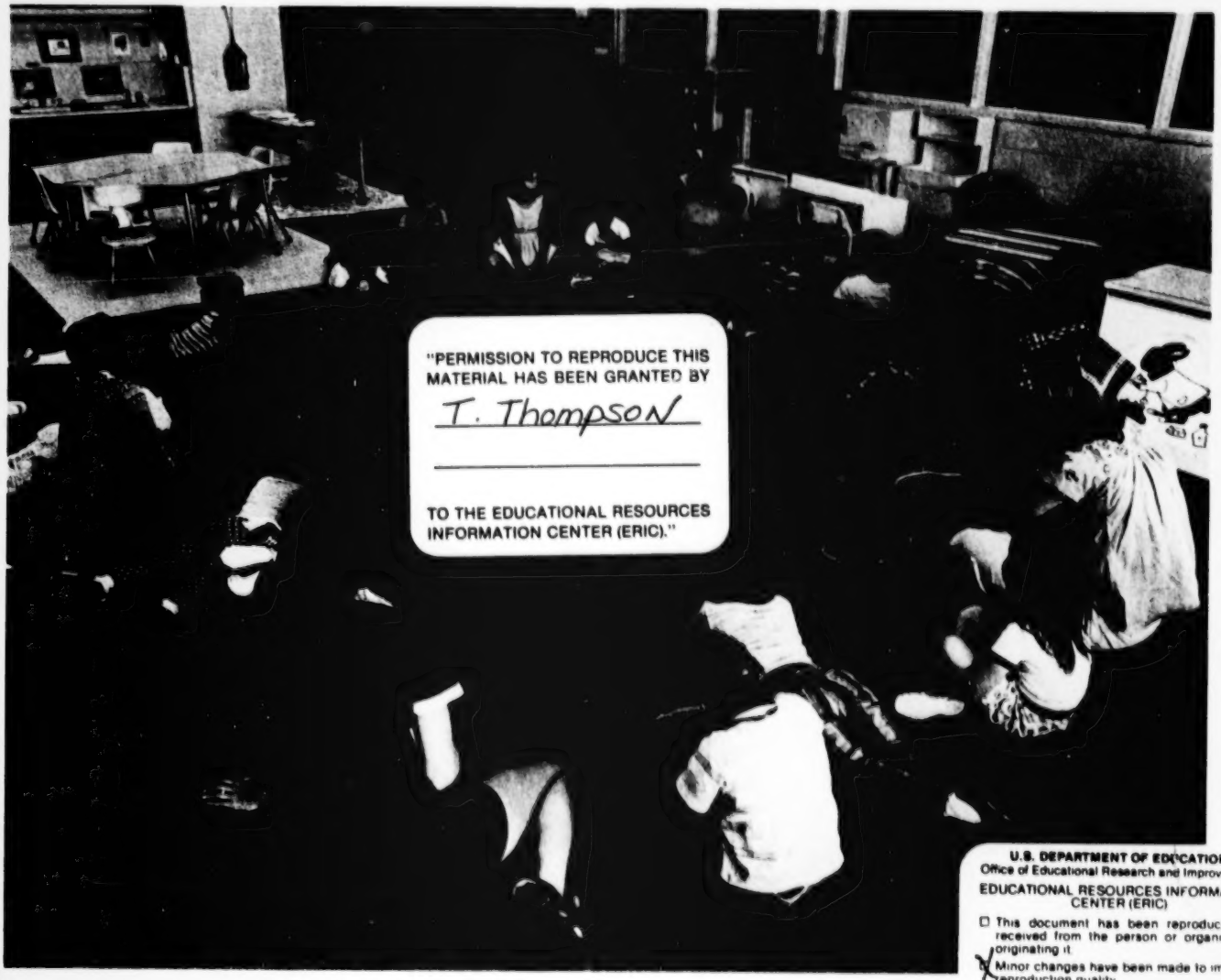
## CLASS ACTS
## Instructional Strategies and Classroom Materials That Work

October 1986



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*Good schools are places where students are seen as people worthy of respect.*

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *The Good High School*

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*The goal of teachers is to make each child as wonderful as possible.*

Herbert Kohl

## Classroom Approaches

Education is nearly as various as life, so consensus about teaching is rare. Most Migrant Educators agree on several things, particularly that the classroom should be a place of mutual respect for individuals and cultures. They emphasize the importance of building self-esteem, and they advocate teaching techniques that use pairs, small groups, peer tutors, and people from the family and community. Migrant Educators tend to downplay the importance of standardized tests. Migrant children should be encouraged to talk, to enrich their verbal skills.

Time and space preclude detailed examination of every subject area for every grade level. As you encounter specific problems in, say, math for the 2nd grade or science for the 8th grade or social studies for the high school, remember that materials and techniques have been developed that might be useful to you, though you will also discover that you and your classes will increasingly develop your own materials. Never hesitate to ask for help from the migrant network. Call *Mentor*. Call your State Migrant Office. Call *MSRTS* or *MERLIN* or *ERIC*. Call Washington. Involve your students in the quest for materials to let them appreciate that they are linked to a large family of educators who are themselves linked to the larger society.

*For years, like many people, I thought of learning as collecting facts or ideas. It was something like eating, or being given medicine, or getting an injection at the doctor's. But from my own experience, and that of children, and from books, I have come to see learning very differently, as a kind of growing, a moving and expanding of the person into the world around him.*

John Holt

## Perils and Pitfalls of Teacher Training

Here is what Herbert Kohl says an ideal philosophy for a Migrant Educator might be: "Like kids, respect people, enjoy your work and be intelligent and flexible enough to build your program from the community you serve. Forget about Teacher's College and prepackaged programs."

That is brilliantly succinct. The book you are reading has been assembled by a Teacher's College as part of a prepackaged program, yet it has no hesitation in endorsing Kohl's view. This course is to provoke your imagination so you may better learn from the community you serve.

This course might be described as "teacher training," though most educators prefer a highfalutin phrase such as "professional preparation." Whatever one calls it, it has had a dubious record. Here is what Stanley Charnovsky says about the sort of venture we are mutually embarked upon:

*Teacher training has created generations of classroom managers, schooled in gimmickry and frightened to death of their children and of their own feelings. Teacher training has created defensive teachers, teachers who in their anticipation of disruption oppress and coerce their students. And teacher training has failed to produce democratic climates for learners who are democratic.*

*And here we sit! One-fourth of our school children are in families that live in or close to a culture of poverty. Many of them, and many others, live in families with varied (sometimes rural) life styles. Teachers come from the dominant and culturally-exclusive middle group in America. They are trained to become the rulers of their domains. They are oppressive to most children; they are intolerant of difference among children within even their own ethnic and cultural phylum; they are misled about the nature of learning and insist on a uniform structuring of subject matter for all their learners; and they confront their classroom situations expecting hostility. Imagine the helplessness that overpowers the children of the poor when they encounter the typically trained American public school teacher!*

If you learn nothing else from this course, learn to look at the classroom through the eyes of your students. If you were a child living a life such as theirs, would you be eager to attend your class?

*Clearly, teacher expectations can determine a student's success or failure both academically as well as socially in any school environment.*

Idolina Vela, Office of Curriculum and Instruction, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District

## Disadvantaged Students or Disadvantaged Schools?

It may make more sense to think of the average public school as disadvantaged than to think of the average

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migrant student as disadvantaged. This perception could be invaluable for a Migrant Educator.

Begin with this rule, a truism from biology based on the workings of the human genetic pool: the children of the poor are born with the same range of intelligence as the children of the rich. They are not failing the schools nearly as much as the schools are failing them. Here is an excerpt from the PDK fastback:

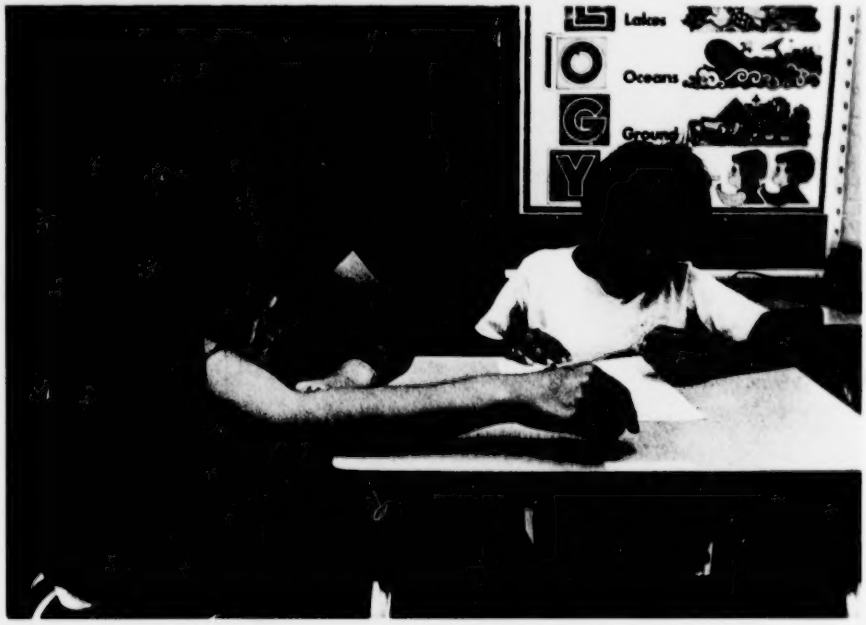
*In the early years, migrant children are eager and enthusiastic. They come to school like the other children, unaware of the difficulties that lie ahead. Everyone else is learning to read and write and they will, too. However, somewhere between the ages of 6 and 9, they tend to lose their vitality and their enthusiasm. As they fall behind in school and experience the unfortunate realities of their world, existence comes to be a grim matter of survival.*

*School can be a very hostile place for a child who is poor and a nomad. It doesn't take long for the migrant child to sense that he or she is different from other children. Such children feel embarrassed by their clothes, ashamed of their housing, and saddened by their exclusion from friendship groups. Other children reinforce these feelings cruelly by thoughtlessness and teasing.*

*Migrant students frequently find themselves in one traumatic situation after another. Not only do they lack friends, but they lack possessions, status, a sense of belonging, and a sense of pride. Their self-confidence is shaken daily, and with each passing year, they show an increasing lack of trust in the school, community, and the larger society.*

There is a constant, unavoidable tension in our schools between an emphasis on excellence for the few versus an emphasis on developing the full potential of the many. People nostalgic for the supposed Good Old Days of high standards should admit that those old days were good for the elite:

*With the dramatic changes in the high school population over the past eighty years (that is, high schools graduated 6 percent of seventeen year olds in 1900; 30 percent in 1930; 59 percent in 1950; and 75 percent in 1979) they have become more diverse and inclusive social institutions. It has become harder to impose academic rigor or maintain discipline when the schools can no longer be selective and when students arrive with such diverse backgrounds, needs, and expectations. When today's adults recall the more orderly, serious high schools of their youth, or remember their parents' reminiscences about school, it is likely that they are referring to institutions that served a more elite and privileged population.*




In our century of rapid change, the schools have become in a sense beleaguered institutions. A recent poll by *Parade* Magazine showed that only 40% of teachers are very satisfied with their jobs, as compared to 52% of other workers. Forty percent of the teachers were increasingly negative about the profession, while one out of three would leave teaching for another job even at the same salary. The authority of schools has declined, along with prestige and morale of teachers. Some critics are very harsh indeed. Here is Jonathan Kozol:

*If certain evils (hard self-interest, for example) do not start within the public school, then it is clear at least that they are deepened and authenticated there.*

The children of the poor have the most need of good schools, yet they are attending schools which are disadvantaged when it comes to teaching them. Too many teachers believe the children of the poor are intellectually inferior. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Here is Herbert Kohl on the fallacy of thinking the poor less capable than the rich: *There is no clear connection between learning and background. This becomes clear when you quantify the general claim and get specific claims like:*

*These children can't learn to add*
*because of their background*
*OR*
*These children can't learn*
*to read simple words*
*because of their background.*

*People from every conceivable background learn to add and read, despite poverty, language differences, cultural and psychological differences. That has been part of the power of public education in our past. The learning problems are more likely caused by the ways school life relates to the child's culture, which is a complex matter that differs from culture to culture.*

*A version of the background argument is:*

These children can't learn because of their poverty and cultural deprivation. *Many people have not learned to read because teachers, believing this myth, have given up on teaching the children of the poor. This is not to minimize the cruel and devastating effects of poverty but simply to point out that one can be poor, demoralized, and oppressed, and still learn to read, especially if reading is felt to have some liberating power.*

*In addition, it is necessary not to confuse poverty with cultural deprivation. To be culturally deprived is, perhaps,*

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*to have your own culture stolen from you or to be isolated from all contact with people of your own group, or to live in a world where cultural forms change faster than they can be assimilated. There are people who are poor and yet culturally rich, and others who are rich and confused about the culture they belong to.*

This argument takes on special force with migrant children. They can learn, given conditions that do not act on them adversely.

Armando Rodriguez, Chief of the Office for Spanish Speaking American Affairs with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, says it is the schools which are disadvantaged, not the Mexican-American children. Most Mexican-American children arrive at school bilingual and bring with them a rich cultural heritage, which the schools define as problems creating educational erosion. Rodriguez says schools define as disadvantaged anyone "not prepared for immediate visible success in our public school system." Furthermore, Rodriguez adds that the school is disadvantaged because "It can only educate those whose mold fits its curriculum. And its curriculum is designed by those whom it has successfully served."

Rodriguez attacks the use of standardized tests on bicultural children, yet he is adamant about the need for high standards of performance. He says, "It has been my experience that teachers confronted with the challenge of bilingual, bicultural children become involved in pity and a program of love and fail to emphasize learning. We need teachers with compassion, but even more we need teachers who understand the child and recognize that the most important asset the youngster can be given is learning."

## How Good are American Elementary Schools?

This is from an Associated Press item in September 1986:

*Elementary education in the United States is "in pretty good shape," concludes a much-awaited report by Education Secretary William J. Bennett. Pretty good, except that children typically leave grade school preferring "Charlie's Angels" to "Charlotte's Web." Pretty good, says the report, except that youngsters often enter high school believing science is a bore, history is a laundry list of unconnected dates and dry facts, and art is finger painting and kazoos. Bennett's conclusion in "First Lessons: A Report on Elementary Education in America" that grade school education in the United States is "in pretty good shape" seems curiously at odds with much of the rest of his 83-page monograph.*

## Class and Caste in the Classroom

If the children of the poor have the same native ability on the whole as more affluent children, then the schools are failing them. This is a cumulative process. Studies show that American schools compare favorably with foreign schools through the first few years, with a subsequent falling off. Migrant students, like mainstream students, do better in the first few grades than they do later.

Migrant students suffer increasingly as the years pass from a sense of their low social status. Schools ought to work to minimize class antagonisms. In fact, schools too often pretend to ignore them, allowing attitudes to solidify, in effect worsening the problem. In this, they copy the society at large, but that is no excuse. Schools ought to be bastions of idealism, to raise standards for the students to aspire toward in later life. Here is what Edgar Z. Friedenberg says about social class in the classroom.

*Students of contrasting social status respond to one another with distant, generalized, potentially hostile uneasiness. The middle-class youngsters have far too little confidence in themselves to respect the lower-status youngsters in their human wholeness, with good qualities and bad. They vaguely dismiss them as a threat—the hoody element—and wish they were not there. They do not profit from the lower-status kids' more confident sexuality and concrete practicality, or learn from them when direct, violent action is more appropriate and legitimate than filing a petition. Nor do they get on good enough terms with the lower-status youngsters to be able to tell them, when the occasion warrants, to scrub up and calm down. The lower-status youngsters reject out of hand the social skills that the middle-class kids possess, and the comparative ease with which they handle symbols and get places on time—their genuine and useful administrative sense—and likewise never get close enough to shake or coax the middle-class kids out of their cool noncommittal stance for the sake of the greater warmth they might share.*

*But not only do the youngsters usually refuse to make real personal contact across class lines. The superficially pleasant but essentially noncommittal ways they evolve for dealing with each other without getting involved also inhibit them from making intense commitments or deep friendships with others of their own background.*

In the upper grades, as extra-curricular activities assume increasing importance, migrant students often feel inadequate, as noted in the PDK fastback:

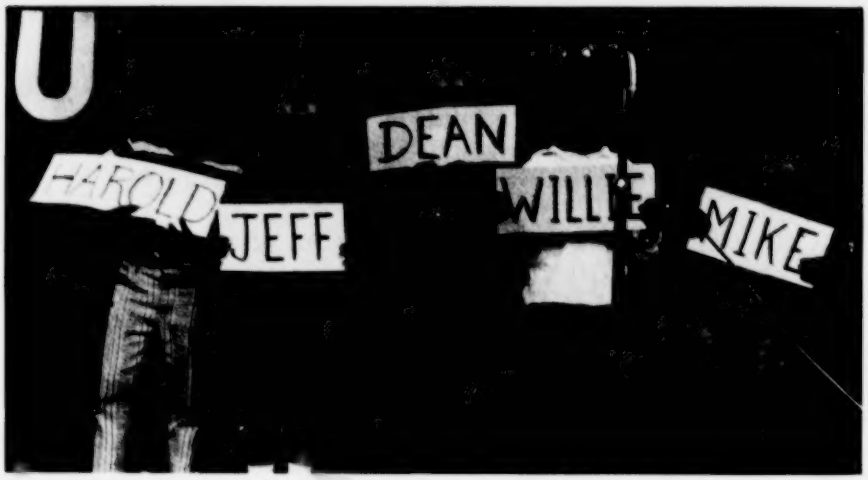
*Migrants seldom are included in community activities, and the children have limited social and recreational opportunities. In junior high and high school, the in-groups exclude these children because of their lower social status and because they are not permanent. The feeling of not belonging or even of being ostracized contributes to their high drop-out rate.*

*Participation in organizations such as Scouts or Little League requires a degree of parent cooperation, leisure time, and frequently money to be effective. The migrant child's family generally lacks these components.*

*The community and school need to find ways to involve the migrant student and family in activities that can be shared, such as picnics, parades and town hall gatherings, Halloween youth dances, and other community and school happenings.*

*The average educational level of the migrant adult is below fourth grade, but migrant parents generally have aspirations for their children to get much more schooling. They see education as the best way for their children to rise above their present way of life.*

*Research shows that most migrant children have dropped out of school by age 16, although sixth-grade migrant children expected to finish high school. The pressure to quit school and start earning a living is difficult to resist given the circumstances of their difficult lives. When they experience defeat and frustration, the tendency is to withdraw, thus cutting themselves off from future opportunities. This in turn leads to a lessened interest in staying in school, particularly when the natural*




*break occurs as they move from one location to another. It is so easy not to enroll in the next school. Who knows? Who cares?*

*Migrant students of all ages, but particularly at the junior high level and up, need to have relevant opportunities to convince them that they should stay in school. The challenge for the school is to make itself an attractive competitor for their time and attention.*

There is no formula for you in coping with this complex issue. Make certain your classroom does not discriminate against the poor by expecting less of them or by overvaluing material things beyond their means. If your school has activities which require cash, find ways to raise that money through group efforts that do not embarrass individuals who lack pocket money.

## Self-Esteem: The Consensus

The development of self-esteem is paramount for the children of migrant workers. Their low self-esteem saps their learning potential. Everyone working with this population is in accord on this issue. The migrant classroom must not erode the self-esteem of its students. They need praise and encouragement. A cooperative atmosphere is better than one which pits individual versus individual in constant competitions. Migrant Educators have a consensus that self-esteem is essential for these students. Harsh discipline, a repressive atmosphere, an anticipation of failure, mockery of mistakes are just some things that can devastate a migrant child with a marginal self-image.

## Self-Esteem: The Controversy

In American government, they say "politics stop at the water's edge," meaning we try not to allow partisanship to impede foreign policy. In American education, the consensus about self-esteem stops at the edge of the field of Migrant Education

Outside of Migrant Ed, a fierce debate rages about this self-esteem issue. It is part of the on-going tension between those who rally to the battle-cry of "high standards" and those who realize that their constituencies will be the likely losers if those so-called standards are imposed in the immediate future.

In the society at large, a cogent argument can be made that the American middle class and its offspring have too much unearned self-esteem. Scholars like Oscar Handlin and Christopher Lasch have argued that excessive self-esteem is destructive to the individual and to the society. It contributes to the narcissism, selfishness, materialism, and narrow view of self-interest which poisons the body politic. This argument holds that narcissism is to the Eighties what neuroticism was to earlier decades.

This argument has been applied to schools as well. *The Shopping Mall High School* is a recent book, well-written and thought-provoking, which decries the tendency of the high schools to define everything as a success of some sort by designing fail-proof programs for students considered too weak intellectually to pass difficult courses and too weak psychologically to cope with failure. In a recent article Barbara Lerner attacks self-esteem as a dangerous orthodoxy as well as a pedagogical fallacy:

*The role of self-esteem in learning has a special status. On a host of other pedagogical questions, teachers have varying viewpoints, and express them freely. On this one, the settled answer goes largely unchanged. Teachers generally seem to accept the modern dogma that self-esteem is the critical variable for intellectual development—the master key to learning. According to this view, children with high self-esteem forge ahead academically, easily and naturally; children with low self-esteem fall behind. They cannot achieve excellence, or even competence, in many cases, until their self-esteem is raised. That, at any rate, is assumption one in what I call the self-esteem theory of intellectual development.*

It is not our intention to attack this point of view. It has its validity. As you encounter these arguments against an emphasis on the development of self-esteem and in favor of high academic standards, remember that they, like standardized tests, have increasing validity as one climbs the economic ladder, and decreasing validity as one descends. It does not mean they have no validity for Migrant Education. Self-esteem is never an end in itself. It is a necessary precondition for accomplishment. We develop a positive self-image because it helps create the confidence needed to master difficult tasks.

This debate is a variation on the one between discipline and freedom in the classroom, the form it took before metamorphosing into self-esteem/standards. In both cases, it tends to be a false dichotomy. Here is a sensible, useful resolution by Herbert Kohl:

*There are times when discipline invites defiance just as there are times when freedom leads to disorder and rewarding behavior leads to bribery. Coercion, neglect, and indulgence, other words for the extremes of discipline, freedom, and reinforcement, can generate learning problems as easily as solve them. For example, neither freedom nor reward will motivate a defiant bored child to learn anything.*

*It makes sense to maximize the joy without forgetting that some learning is boring, some frustrating, and some outright painful. It also makes sense to remember that some complex and sophisticated things can be mastered joyfully. Many times debates over "the*

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*basics" turn into arguments among the pain, pleasure and reward people. However, all sides are right, in a way. Significant learning involves hard work and discipline. It also involves play, experimentation, discovery, reward, and fun. For the sake of health and sanity it pays to maximize the pleasure. It also pays to look beyond motivation to the content, the learning, and the use of what is learned in the student's life to understand when student motivation leads to learning rather than frustration.*

## Flexibility

Flexibility is another word with positive connotations among Migrant Educators. Teachers ought to be flexible enough to individualize a curriculum to meet the varying needs of specific students. Ginger L. Schlegel of the Region II Migrant Service Center at Prairie Grove, Arkansas, says "Be flexible. The wide variety of needs (educational, emotional, social, health etc.) is as individual as the child. No one program or technique can be all things to all people." Here is the PDK fastback on the problem of inflexibility in typical high schools:

*In high school new problems arise. Requirements are such that students complete a prescribed course with a certain set time frame and because some migrants often come too late or leave too early to receive unit credit for a course or courses, failure to graduate is a built-in conclusion. Seldom can migrant students be accommodated by the typical high school because of its lack of flexibility. There is a growing awareness of this problem of inflexibility, and some programs now are sending teachers across state lines to follow up migrant students who can then receive credit at a home high school for work completed on the road.*

We could quote Migrant Educators *ad infinitum* on the benefits of flexibility. Remember, though, that books like *Shopping Mall High School* take the diametrically opposite position, insisting that the schools are too flexible because they try to please everybody. It comes down to whether you adjust the curriculum to fit the child or adjust the child to fit the curriculum.

People who believe the curriculum is, or ought to be, sacrosanct, representing a single standard to which every American ought to repair, are willing

to insist that each child conform to this curriculum or admit failure. People who believe that the mainstream curriculum represents not Holy Writ but rather the interests of the middle class students best prepared to succeed under its hegemony are more interested in flexibility. This issue will not go away.

You must help to resolve this in your teaching. Expect and demand a great deal of your students, but do it in ways that build their self-esteem. Be willing to adjust your teaching to the needs of the individual students in front of you.

As Migrant Educators, we must not fall for our own line. We must not, in the name of compassion, fail our students by expecting too little of them.

By the same token, we must recognize that a lot of the guff about excellence and high standards is self-serving cant on behalf of the people who have a head start in the race for the top and want to keep that head start for themselves and their children. Emerson said people would be astonished by common sense and plain dealing, so you may wish to astonish critics who invoke the shibboleth of "high standards" by challenging them with the notion that their idea of excellence is in fact a subtle means of social control intended to keep most of the poor in their places, with a few token exceptions who manage to mimic the middle class well enough to join the club.

## Standardized Tests

The tyranny of standardized testing is a fact of life in American schools. Migrant Educators are suspicious of the standardized tests, and they are not alone. The tests were developed around the turn of the century when proper WASP educators worried about the supposed low level of intelligence of recent immigrants from Europe. Many scholars feel that the cultural bias in these instruments, which everyone today concedes, was in fact not so much a by-product as a reason for having the tests at all.

Here is an excerpt from *The Shopping Mall High School* on the origins of standardized testing:

*There was some opposition to these notions. Walter Lippmann and John Dewey argued that the tests were crude measurers at best, that whatever they measured was very uncertain, and that the doctrine of racial traits was no less problematic for scientific reasons than for political ones.*

*Fretful school officials began with a belief that the recent immigrants were intellectually inferior.*

*Given their assumptions about the mental capacities of immigrants and poor people, it seemed reasonable to conclude that the high schools would have to revise their offerings radically if they were to cope successfully with the newcomers.*

*Few educators tried to check on the validity of these ideas about high school students' capacities. Those who did check found evidence to the contrary, but no one paid attention.*



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Here is a blunt statement from *Educating Migrant Children:*

*Standardized tests generally have limited validity for the migrant child, because these tests are not culture-free. The curriculum must begin where the child is and utilize his special interests and abilities, so that the learning experiences will provide for his specific needs.*

This is from an Idaho handbook for migrant educators called *Learning Together.*

**Evaluation and Testing**

*This is probably the most trying area of our entire program. Our regular standardized tests are prepared for the English-speaking child of Anglo-American culture so they are not valid for his Mexican-American counterpart. On the whole, because of the goals and purposes of the migrant program, the major emphasis should be on teaching, not testing; on active learning, not passive listening; on growth, not grades; on respect for self and others, not on regurgitation.*

*Our evaluation has to be on an individualized basis wherein the teacher makes a subjective evaluation of the growth of each child. This, of course, is not very scientific but any instruments that we can devise to present a more accurate picture of this growth will enlarge our scope of knowledge of our success (or failure) with these children. During the summer session, the children should be grouped chronologically and then the teacher will have to rely on her own diagnostic tests, locater tests, anecdotal records (when available), and other relevant materials in grade placement.*

Idolina Vela agrees that testing is the most trying area of Migrant Education but she is dubious about subjective measurements, fearing migrants will be harmed by inconsistency in evaluation. She wants better guidelines and testing instruments. She says, "Testing can be a valuable tool if used appropriately to diagnose content mastery." Hers is certainly the orthodox, prudent, majority viewpoint. The problem arises because the existence of a test warps the classroom environment because no power on earth will prevent teachers from drilling on the materials to be tested. That's the way the real world works.

The minority view is worth thinking about, though. John Holt says, "any tests that are not a personal matter between the learner and someone helping him or her learn, but were given instead to grade and label students for someone else's purposes (employers, colleges, evaluators of schools, administrators, anxious parents, etc.) are illegitimate and harmful." Herb Kohl agrees:

*It is essential to oppose the tyranny of testing, to eliminate the equation of teaching with testing, and to undermine the notion that test performances can provide an objective measure of intelligence and ability. If we can achieve this, the way will be open for teachers to teach once more and for interesting content and thoughtful learning to take place.*

*It is essential that people understand that standardized tests, though they do not yield useful assessments of what individual children do, have other effects on children and schools. A pamphlet put out by the North Dakota Study Group on Testing describes some of the pernicious effects of the use of standardized tests:*

1. *They often determine children's future class placement and classification (slow, bright).*
2. *They put pressure on teachers to spend large portions of time coaching children for tests—trying to outwit the test makers.*
3. *They affect the curriculum, the skills, and the values of the school, since teachers will often shape the school day to fit the tests, not the children.*

While the teachers distort the classroom environment to cope with tests, the students learn that high test scores are more important than independent thinking . Robert B. Davis, noting that a large proportion of today's students tell teachers what they think the teachers want to hear instead of what the students really believe, concludes "There can be no graver danger to the healthy use of the human intellect."

Here is Paul Goodman:

*In elementary schools, children are tested by yes-and-no and multiple-choice questions because these are convenient to tabulate; then there is complaint later that they do not know how to articulate their thoughts.*

Here is Stanley Charnofsky on the absurdity of using standardized tests on populations not included in establishing the standards:

*Our major means of uniformly identifying children remains the intelligence test. We continue to place children in special classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR) or the educationally handicapped (EH) by comparing them to normative groups on such tests. Yet the groups from which these tests were standardized, and therefore the population for whom they are intended, to not include children of culturally diverse backgrounds of bilingual speech patterns. In administering such tests to Mexican-American children, I have found them useless in predicting educational potential. Their major use is to measure knowledge of the American idiom and the American home's pattern of enrichment (educational toys, puzzles, games, etc.) And this we really could have gauged without administering the tests.*

*But our schools continue to make assumptions about the Mexican-American child based upon these culturally biased instruments. The child is often relegated to a special class and frequently offered a sterilized curriculum geared to what school officials believe to be his capability. One high school principal once made the point to a group of his teachers that "our children just can't achieve very well with intellectual-type offerings, so we emphasize vocational trades for them." The lack of challenge for the Mexican-American child becomes the mode, and his academic antipathy a self-fulfilling expectation.*

Charnovsky carries this argument further, asserting that American culture is obsessed with making value judgments on a constant basis.

*Another middle-class trait which silently but ubiquitously operates among our teachers is the notion (it is really much more than a notion—it is really a powerful and primary drive in our culture) that all of the children need constantly to be evaluated. Our society is remarkably, if not uniquely, judgmental.*

*We tend to impose a good or bad meaning upon most of the experiences in our lives. Our teachers, of course, merely reflect in school the heavy cultural emphasis of the larger community upon judging, measuring, rewarding, and last but obviously not least, punishing.*

*A tragic by-product of our American middle-class trait of judging everything is that, on the scale we use, our minor-*

*ities within the system—our people of little power—find themselves evaluated repeatedly low. Looked at in a broader sense, this means that they are constantly, if not deliberatley, being punished. As has been noted earlier, the psychological impact of this constant negative bombardment becomes overwhelming to the self-concept of any individual. (Indeed, we need not look only to our minorities to find punishment used to degrade and humiliate; it is, sadly enough, a rather standard tool of many of our carefully trained and constantly in-control teachers.)*

As a teacher of migrants, what can you *do*? You can view the results of standardized tests with skepticism. You can develop your own instruments to measure your students and their growth. Most of all, you can teach them to measure themselves, to test themselves against their own aspirations. They will move away from you soon. You must give them tools they can carry with them. Let them work with you in measuring their progress toward clearly established goals.

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*The increasing reliance on standardized tests is an awesomely racist practice.*

Chuck Stone,
syndicated columnist,
"Blackboard Jungle
is White," 1986

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## The Testing Dilemma

You must have misgivings about both the reliability and the validity of standardized tests for migrant children. Still, the tests will not go away. In a recent article entitled "The Progress of Our Stupidity About Students' Intelligence," David Nyberg says "No group on earth is so tested as are American children. They are tested early to determine which ones will receive special encouragement, and later to determine which (usually the same ones) will get a shot at attaining high status through attending the best colleges and universities. Thus is determined the substance of the nation. The danger is that because of the uniformity of the tests the diversity of educated talent available to high levels of social responsibilities will decline—not to mention the negative effect on motivation, and therefore on the quality of production, in a society where the majority test out as 'wanting' in ability, aptitude, or intelligence." In other words, the tests ensure that the children of the people now in charge will stay in charge, while the children of those with low status will be branded for low status themselves by biased tests.

Testing for migrants can be so destructive that bright children may be diagnosed as learning impaired. Despite this, the American mania for testing is such that even the ERIC fact sheet "Educational Testing for Migrant Students," while conceding that the problem exists, tries to be upbeat about the availability of appropriate tests. The gentle critic John Holt once suggested that teachers organize to refuse administering the tests but that is not going to happen. You are entitled to be skeptical, even paranoid about test results. Above all, avoid the temptation to tailor your classroom to preparing the students to do well on standardized tests. That sort of classroom bores even children of the affluent for whom it is the path to lucrative careers. For everyone else, it is deadly. Keep your classroom alive and vital for everyone, with individual attention to specific talents and trouble spots.

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*We are all too likely to see, and only to see, what we look for, or what we expect to see. If teachers feel they have to read what other teachers have said about the children in their class, they should wait until they have had at least a couple of months to get to know them and to make their own impressions.*

John Holt

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Because Migrant Educators have migrant students for so short a time, they feel pressure to use and rely upon previous evaluations. Useful as that data is, use it with caution. A label can be as hard to get rid of as a tattoo. Migrant Educators from Oneonta told in 1986 of a girl diagnosed as learning impaired who after a brief period of tutoring was diagnosed as gifted, a more accurate and more helpful label.

## Continuity

Educators agree that continuity is a key to educational success. Establishing that continuity for migrant children is difficult. In fact, it has proven impossible. They must provide the continuity within themselves and their families.

Cassandra Stockberger notes that many programs for migrant children are designed by administrators to solve administrative problems. MSRTS is "clearly designed to move the migrant child through the school system." While not a pernicious end, the transfer of records is of minimal value in the actual education of a child. In 1974 the National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children said that transfer of information would not necessarily help children perform according to their potential because "the flaws of the system are inherent in the facts of migrancy." The NCEMC said "What the education of migrant children calls for is not the imposition of orderly systems on their disorderly lives, but the skills to deal with the disorder." You must develop the skills to help migrant children and their families value learning constantly despite their nomadic ways.

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*Helping migratory farmworker children and their parents take greater control over their lives through gaining education is an important program. However, it is important that persons working with this population understand that they must develop training and education approaches that facilitate self-learning and actualization.*

Franklin D. Williams,
East Coast Farmworker
Support Network

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The migrant families must take their commitment to education with them because mobility is their form of continuity. Educators cannot follow so scattered a migration. It has been tried. Here is a description of a recent attempt to move with the migrants by a religious ministry:

*Some dioceses have experimented with mobile teams that follow migrant workers as they go up and down the streams. We have noticed that these teams are not very efficient. Migrants tend to go in all different directions, dictated by very intangible variables such as weather, economic trends and even INS activities. Unless each diocese establishes centers in impacted areas, it is unbelievable to think that they can respond to the needs of migrants. Migrants have a sophisticated underground network, a word of mouth communication system. Once they identify centers they will keep them as points of reference and will*

*seek them out. All migrant ministers have experienced the great sacrifices, the great distances that migrants will travel to attend classes.*

As a general instructional strategy, then, we must accept that teachers can neither travel with the migrants nor have everything on hand when they arrive. This is why it is so crucial to involve the entire migrant family in the adventure of education, and to provide the child with the inner strength of self-esteem and the inner-direction of self-evaluation. You must teach the child to expect great things of himself or herself, knowing that in other schools they may encounter low expectations that can be self-fulfilling prophecies of failure.

Read these thoughts by Cassandra Stockburger from her 1980 study *The Impact of Interstate Programs on Continuity in Migrant Education:*

*There is no alternative to the public schools for the education of large numbers of children. Therefore, it must follow that children enrolled in these schools have to meet certain requirements, although research and the experience of the past twenty-five years or so should warn us that a better balance needs to be struck between molding the child to the system and bending the system to fit the child's needs.*

*Migrant educators need to develop new techniques to take advantage of the natural continuity which exists within the child and his family. Schools change, curriculums change and records continue not to show up. But the child always has himself and his parents. He has what he knows and what he is able to do.*

*Migrant educators may be in danger of taking a patronizing stance toward migrant children and their families. They may be doing too much for them and expecting too little from them. It seems entirely reasonable that migrant parents can be motivated and trained to take responsibility for considerably more personal information and initiative in their own behalf than they are currently permitted to.*

*In the end, continuity in migrant education must mean bringing together all those factors which impinge on the child's total educational experience—the child and his feelings, his attitudes, his environment, his parents and family, the crew, the employer, the community, the school—in order to create within the child a coherent whole. If need be, the system must be bent, not the child. How naturally coordination of all services at the national, state, and local level falls into place when we are able to perceive them as part of continuity for the child's whole life.*

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*Children are not empty vessels into which the content of culture is poured. They are as much makers as receivers.*

Neil Postman

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## Teaching Methods

It is risky to talk about teaching techniques that can be applied to so diverse a population over every age group and subject matter. We will suggest Three G's: Groups, Games, and Gabfests. These general approaches have proven valuable with migrant students. As techniques, they implement a philosophy which emphasizes the central role of the students in their own education.

### Group Activities

Many educators attest to the value of working in small groups, rather than having all the students face the front of the room to listen to the teacher, giving short responses to specific questions. There is evidence that cooperative techniques work better with minority students than they do with more individualistic white middle class children. Here is Robert Slavin:

*In general, studies in middle class white schools have been somewhat less successful in showing achievement gains than those in integrated and/or working class schools. This is further borne out by the findings of an interaction between ethnicity and treatment favoring gains in cooperative classes by minority students. Wheeler's findings of a strong interaction between cooperative predisposition and achievement gains emphasizes the importance of the particular population involved in a study, particularly as many studies have shown that white, middle class Americans are less cooperatively predisposed than other groups, including American blacks and Mexican-Americans. Only one of the 25 studies reviewed here showed greater achievement in a control group than in a cooperatively taught group, and several studies in white middle class settings showed positive achievement effect, so it is unlikely that these techniques would hurt the achievement of white middle class students. Cooperative classroom techniques may be a means of reducing the achievement gap between white and minority students while still increasing the achievements of the whites more than in traditional classrooms.*

*Presently, the research on cooperative learning in classrooms justifies the following conclusions:*

1. *For academic achievement, cooperative learning techniques are no worse than traditional techniques, and in most cases they are significantly better.*
2. *For low level learning outcomes, such as knowledge, calculation, and application of principles, cooperative learning techniques appear to be more effective than traditional techniques to the degree that they use:*
   *(a) A structured, focused, schedule of instruction;*
   *(b) Individual accountability for performance among team members;*
   *(c) A well-defined group reward system, including rewards or recognition for successful groups.*
3. *For high level cognitive learning outcomes, such as identifying concepts, analysis of problems, judgment, and evaluation, less structured cooperative techniques that involve high student autonomy and participation in decision-making may be more effective than traditional individualistic techniques.*
4. *Cooperative learning techniques have strong and consistent effects on relationships between black, white, and Mexican-American students.*
5. *Cooperative learning techniques have fairly consistent positive effects on mutual concern among students regardless of the specific structure used.*
6. *There is some indication that cooperative learning technqies can improve students' self-esteem.*
7. *Students in classes using cooperative learning generally report greater liking of school than do traditionally taught students.*

*What these results indicate is that cooperative learning techniques can achieve both cognitive and affective goals, but that there is still much to be discovered about when they do so-for which kinds of students, under what conditions, in which subjects, and for which techniques or components of*

*techniques are positive effects likely to be observed?*

*There is already enough evidence from field research to support the use of cooperative learning techniques in schools, particularly desegregated schools.*

Don Snedeker says that Hispanic children work very comfortably in pairs and small groups, while Michael Reed reminds us that this format gets the children to talk more freely, enriching their verbal skills:

*Make the activity more verbal. You can't have children who have mastered a social activity, a social type of language, or children who are limited in English in their oral proficiency, you can't have them improve by having someone else doing the talking, which tends to be the case in many of the classes. The teacher is the center of activitiy and many teachers will say, "Oh, but there's talking going on in my classroom." There is talking going on in her classroom and she is doing most of it and the talking that the children are doing is basically very short responses. To prove this to yourself, if you have any doubt of who is doing the talking in the classroom, all you have to do is be a casual observer in a classroom. Go into any classroom that you want and time what percentage of the time the teacher is doing the talking and take one or two children as you go in, put your watch on those children and every time they say something, time them. You will see how very, very little time each child gets to talk when they're in the classroom. When they're not talking, they're not improving orally. It can't be done. No child has ever learned to talk by listening. It just doesn't happen. That's one of the things that linguists have shown us. If you want children to learn to talk, you have to get them to do the talking. That's just an established fact. It doesn't happen the other way around, by listening. So, how can we compensate for this? We want the children doing the talking. Well, this demands a major revision in our thinking because we have always established the teacher as the center of her classroom. We've always allowed the teacher to be the font of knowledge. There is a way, though, in which if we have children involved in small groups and have them as the center of activity, have them involved in discovering something, that we can have them do the talking.*

David and Roger Johnson of the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, among others, are advocating a procedure which involves group interaction and requires the task to be structured so that each member makes a contribution to the success of the whole. In addition, students of all ability levels learn faster and develop higher level cognitive skills through group learning.

In their book, *Circles of Learning*, the Johnsons document the benefits of cooperative learning toward language development. Since language acquisition develops from the need and the desire to communicate, group interaction is the most effective way to promote both first and second language development.

Don Snedeker is very keen on what we now call peer tutoring. It was common practice in the traditional one-room schoolhouse to have the more advanced students help the ones still mastering the material. In fact, in the one-room schoolhouse, it was acceptable for younger children to tutor older ones who were more likely to have missed work while helping with planting or harvesting. We can get back to that, both formally and informally. The PDK fastback recommends hiring migrant students as aides:

*With each progressive year, the migrant child faces increasing pressures to leave school and go to work in the fields. Families frequently need the money the child can earn. To offset such pressures, some schools are selecting bilingual high school or college students who have rural/migrant backgrounds to work part-time as aides in elementary and middle schools. These students receive stipends that help to keep them in school.*

*Other benefits of employing students to work in classroom are:*

1. *They may recruit others to stay in school or to return to school.*
2. *They are able to tutor migrant children in their own language.*
3. *They relate to parents effectively.*
4. *The new role improves their self-identity, self-concept, and sense of worth.*
5. *They have exposure to teaching as a profession for themselves.*

*(Few bilingual migrant children actually become teachers, although the need for such teachers is great.)*

*Probably the most rewarding outcome of such programs for the student aides is that while earning and learning through tutoring, they develop postive attitudes about the importance of education and come to perceive school as a nice place to be.*

This is as good a place as any to extol

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the contribution of teacher aides. Aris Diaz of the Center for the Study of Migrant and Indian Education at Toppenish, Washington, quoted a teacher on one too common error: "Sometimes I feel that the *aide* is confused with the *maid.*" Children will learn from good teachers whether those teachers have advanced degrees or not. Seek good aides from within the migrant community. Here is a suggestion from Herbert Kohl:

*Another priority, one which is also not difficult to achieve (and certainly not expensive), is to bring people from the community into the schools and get students into the community. This flow in and out of the school should not be confused with a one-time visit or a talk or lecture. Schools should be invited to use the resources of the community to enrich their programs, and people with skills should be encouraged to share them with young people.*

*One way to develop a program like this is to have several classes work on a community resources questionnaire, and then have the students go out into the community and do all the interviewing and compiling of data themselves. Simply doing the interviews is a way to initiate student mobility. Moreover, many community people might find it harder to refuse a student request for a participation than to refuse one that came through official channels.*

*The development of community learning programs can have the additional benefit of enriching the content of what is offered to students. It can give them a feel for many more possibilities for themselves as adults than can any commercially produced program on vocational choice.*

**The Holding Power of Peer Tutoring**

*The students are staying in school, not necessarily because they are being advised or cautioned but because they are developing positive concepts of themselves. By having to tutor, they are picking up a lot of skills, they have a sense of responsibility and a sense of needing the skills to pass on.*

Jose Cardenas,
Director of the Intercultural Development Research Center,
San Antonio, Texas

**Games**

Bernice Clemons, a migrant teacher from Louisiana, said in 1984 that "I can teach more from a game than I can from books." Research has shown that games which give rewards and recognition based on teamwork and small group performance enhance learning in many ways, and that this technique is particularly effective with migrants. For a detailed analysis with an extensive bibliography, see Robert Slavin's "Cooperative Learning" in the Summer of 1980. *Review of Educational Research*, pages 315-342.

Ruby Wigginton, a Migrant Educator from Wynne, Arkansas, says "In dealing with these students I try to identify things they do well, respect their opinions, and encourage them to use their talents (many times well hidden). We play games mostly that are relevant to the subject being taught. We play very few games that are of a winning-losing nature. They already know about losing."

So we have a recognition that games are useful learning experiences for migrant children, yet that too much emphasis on winning is not beneficial. There is no contradiction here. The PDK fastback urges Migrant Educators to "Avoid competition-failure traps." Do not set up situations which require most of the students to fail so that one or two can win. Use games in which all teams can have a sense of accomplishment.

**Gabfests**

Our facetious Three G's were Groups, Games, and Gabfests. In more formal parlance, we wish to emphasize the importance of speech. Herbert Kohl says "Children will not write if they are afraid to talk." Too many children are intimidated by the very atmosphere of the classroom.

Michael Reed stresses the importance of speech for Limited English Proficiency students:

*Teachers should be cognizant of four general principles of instruction which have been promoted by the leading researchers in order to help the LEP child gain the cognitive skills they need without placing them at a disadvantage due to any English language limitations. It is interesting to note that these principles are applicable to instruction of* all *children, not just LEP. The four principles are:*

1. Each child must be afforded a greater opportunity to express himself orally in the classroom. *This does not diminish the importance of the teacher. It is recognized that a 'model' English speaker is necessary for the children. The teacher, in essence, becomes the model. However, the teacher no longer constitutes the center of the learning activity, as is the case in most traditional classrooms settings. The learning activity must be designed so as to have the children doing the exploration and self-teaching (most orally) once the teacher has provided necessary orientation and background.*
2. The activities must involve 'Real Language.' *The question and answer type of response which characterizes most traditional classroom settings does not constitute 'real language' according to almost all research. This conclusion is formulated on the knowledge that there is no equivalent for the type of language generated in the classroom with any type of language observed outside the school. By having children talking among themselves, and not responding with quick answers to questions posed by a teacher, real language can be generated in the classroom.*
3. The children must assume responsibility for their own learning. *Through the completion of the learning activities, each child must come to realize that failure to do 'one's part' has consequences in terms of the progress of others. A child must be held responsible by his peers for completing some task which impacts on others in the class.*
4. The learning situation must be highly contextualized, but at the same time, in order to move the child forward intellectually, it must be cognitively demanding. *The learning situation should involve tasks which have something in common with the world of the child. The tasks should, whenever possible, involve real objectives, real problems and real people. The learning situation should not be 'watered down' intellectually. It should involve use of all the basic skills in some manner which entails critical thinking or problem solving. Children who are not challenged will not learn to handle similar cognitive tasks which are common in the decontextualized exercises of traditional classrooms.*

What is an example of a learning activ-

ity which incorporates all these concepts?

*The following represents one among a million activities which embodies these four aftermentioned principles.*

*A group of five migrant children is assigned the task of composing a letter to be sent via modem, i.e., electronically, to some migrant pen pals in Florida. The group must discuss and write two opening paragraphs which describe the community in which they live. In addition, each of the five must describe himself in a paragraph to be included in the letter.*

Teachers should seize every opportunity for informal conversation with students, too. This is from *Educating Migrant Children: The best way for a teacher to learn about a child is through shared conversations. In these teacher-pupil conferences, the tone should be informal. Help the child relax. A teacher can find out more about a child while sitting with him at the lunch table, swinging side by side on the school playground swing-seat, or standing together at the classroom guinea pig cage then he could ever expect to learn while seated at the teacher's desk. Nothing, however, can surpass visiting the child in the home environs or taking him to the teacher's home.*

We could cite authority upon authority about the importance of getting these young people to speak out in class, in their own words and at length. Here is Alfonso Ramirez, director of a bilingual program in the Rio Grande Valley: *It is only in the first years of school that the non-English-speaking children get an opportunity to practice English in the classroom. From the fourth and fifth grades on we don't know how to teach children to speak, so for all practical purposes the child is attending class and sitting there and never has much to say. The whole setup in classrooms is traditional, the desks in long rows in cavernous rooms, the teacher up front. Speaking is discouraged, rather than encouraged. In most situations he [the farm worker child] is pretty much a spectator in the classroom, rather than a participant.*

Here is Herbert Kohl: *On a positive note, I believe an important thing we can do easily and quickly is reestablish the importance of student speech and open-ended discussion in school. Comprehension and content should be a major focus for revitalization of the schools. Teachers should be encouraged to devote time to listening to their students. Community people should be invited into schools to discuss current issues. Debates, storytelling, discussion and critical analysis of films and books, should replace textbook questions and test-taking. Intelligent conversation, improvisation, well-thought-out questioning, can and should be woven into all of the subjects taught at school.*

Don Snedeker puts it thus: "Any way to make the environment linguistically rich for these children should be exploited."

John Holt was enthusiastic about using cassette tape recorders to record the voices of children because the machines are simple enough for the kids to use by themselves. They can talk into the machine to hear what they sound like, they can make recordings of their favorite stories, they can interview one another like celebrities or broadcast imaginary sporting events.

Authorities agree that groups, games, and gabfests are appropriate ways to work with migrant children. Make sure they do not spend all their time listening to you, as if learning consisted of repeating back whatever teachers say. You can tell them what they need to know while listening to what they have to say, and it can be done in an informal atmosphere of small group work and play.

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*Migrant students can validate their family experience, their language, and their culture by having the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers and their teachers.*

Nancy Leon,
Curriculum and Staff
Development Coordinator
Monterey County
Office of Education

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## The Terrible Truth

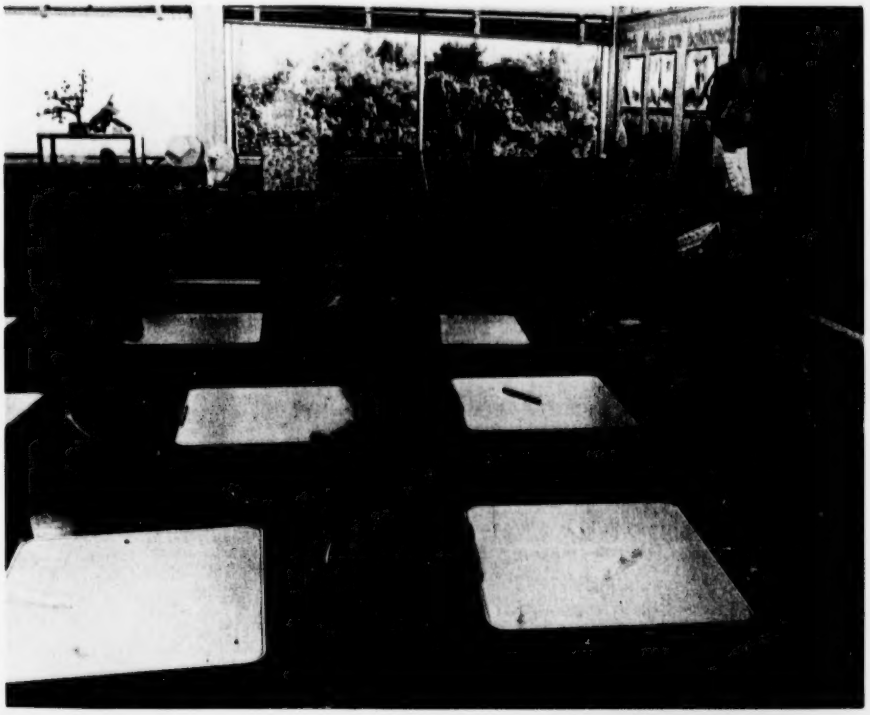
The schools that are failing migrant children are themselves in big trouble, as so many recent reports have documented. One of the most recent was also one of the most pessimistic. Conducted by Deans from schools of education, this report by the Holmes Group said it would be increasingly difficult to get good teachers in the near future. Just as bad, it had little good to say about today's teachers, saying most of them "exhibit no deep grasp of their subjects nor any passion for them," and that "their pedagogy is as sadly lacking as their grasp on the material." Migrant Educators working to get better performance in bad schools might be likened to sailors polishing the brass on the Titanic. Your individual responsibility is to be certain that you know and love your subject matter. If you do not know it, get busy and learn it. If you do not care about it, find another line of work. Bored, indifferent teachers produce bored, indifferent students.

## The Plus Side

*Educating Migrant Children* points out the obvious advantage of Migrant Education: "It is an exciting thing to have children of different backgrounds and cultures within a classroom. They learn from one another."

The children of different backgrounds will only learn from another, of course, if they learn to respect one another's differences. Here is Sara Lightfoot, from *The Good High School:*

*In all of the good schools I visited, there are vivid examples of this care and concern for the weakest members. The care may be expressed by feats of mercy and love on the part of faculty and counselors. It may also be revealed in their recognitions of the limits of their ability to help in defining the tenuous boundaries between a therapeutic and an educational community. But more than these acts of incredible love for the weak, I will remember the general attitudes of respect and good will towards all students in these good schools. In every case, adults interacted with adolescents in ways that underscored their strength and power. Occasionally I heard faculty voice words of discouragement, frustration, and even outrage to one another about difficulties they were having with students. But even the backstage conversations in the faculty rooms were not abusive of them. Teachers did not use students as targets of their own rage or projections of their own weaknesses. There must have been at least a few angry teachers who purposefully victimized students. But I either missed seeing them, or their negative behavior was*



*muted by the critical regard of their peers. Good schools are places where students are seen as people worthy of respect.*

Migrant Education must reach beyond the classroom to encompass family and community. Here is what the PDK fastback says: *The ultimate goal of the migrant classroom is to help each child reach his highest potential. To fulfill this function, the school will need to reach out to the migrant child and family, to be language-oriented, to coordinate with other community agencies, and to make efficient use of all of its resources, human and otherwise.*

There is some evidence that special summer programs for migrants have done this better than ordinary schools.

While their educational content was similar, the summer programs were superior in involving families because of flexible schedules, field trips, picnics, fairs, and camping excursions. Even in regular school during the regular year, you must work to duplicate that home-school cooperation. The student will soon leave your school, so you must make your impact on the family as a unit.

We will close with Stanley Charnofsky's paean to cultural diversity:

*As John Collier has written of "the long hope" for the Indians of America, so must "the new hope" be expressed for all of the people of poverty in our country. That new hope rests with the creation and continued development of a new colony of facilitators who understand and appreciate the magnificence of human diversity. The new hope rests with a more humanizing, less stultifying, less structured experience of professional preparation for people who are to be helpers. And that new hope rests with the awareness that a teacher is a releaser, not a controller; an initiator, not a manipulator.*

*True facilitators must understand the nature of discovery and must tolerate differences in pacing, in curiosity, in methodology; they must offer the child an unconditional chance to try for himself, and they must relinquish the role of judge and evaluator. When the child achieves and knows it, senses his control, and feels his power, he is on his way to vigorous and rewarding encounters with life.*

*While teachers are largely in-the-school employees, when working with children of differing life styles they must reach for more imaginative approaches. To be relevant, a teacher must be in and of and often for the community.*

*Our writing closes with a final challenge to the deeper meaning of American patriotism and national pride. Can our schools continue to apply the delicate and narrow tolerance for behavioral and cultural styles that have dominated them in the past? Or can we live up to our original, prophetic destiny as a land of cultural diversity and of educational opportunity for all? Can all American children receive valuable educations in our public schools while retaining and cherishing their own identities, pride in themselves, the uniqueness of their cultures, and a sense of control or power over their own destinies? This is our challenge and our opportunity.*

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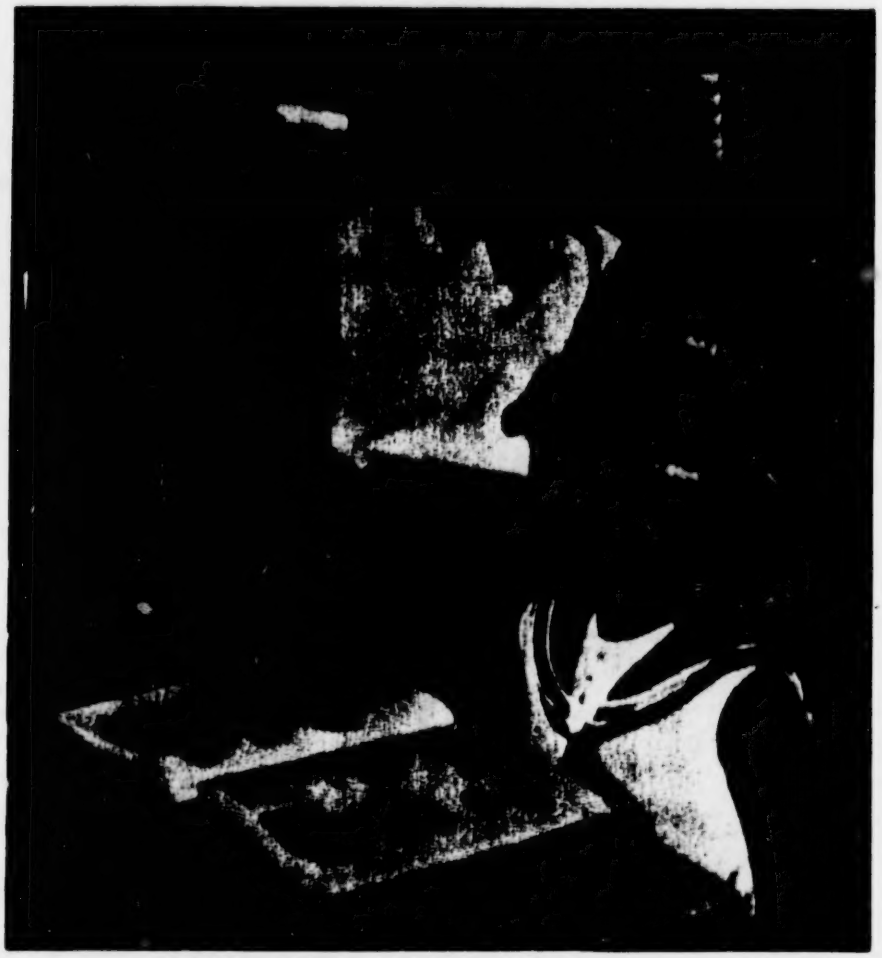

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*Believe that migrant students can achieve and can succeed in school, and let them know you believe in their abilities. Think of the positive aspects of being migrant: bicultural, bilingual, adaptable, responsible, and so on.*

Nancy Leon,
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